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The technologies for entertainment and information are abounding, but what is it that still makes you glued to the good old radio? If you've listened to Jay Allison, then you'll probably know why. The recipient of virtually every major media industry award (including five Peabodys) for his productions and collaborations, Allison is a celebrated US radio producer. He is best known for literally bringing life into his programs with real life stories of both ordinary and extraordinary people.



'This I believe' is one of his highly anticipated works, which saw its Nepali version Mero Jindagi, Mero Biswas program, which was supported by USAID, last year. Jay Allison, in collaboration with USAID, visited Nepal to lead three workshops for more than 50 Nepali radio journalists.

And in a recent interview, he talks about his life with radio and his love of storytelling. *Excerpts:*

How did you get into radio programming?

I got into it in my 20s; I sort of stumbled into it. I was unemployed after having worked in the theatre for years. Then a guy from the national public radio, which was just beginning in Washington D.C., loaned me a tape recorder. He gave me the recorder and said, "Hey why don't you go use this and collect stories?" It was like a key to a kingdom. I just started traveling and talking to people, and after coming back, I used to cut the tape and mix it on lots of machine. It was like the theatre, but it was real.

In what way is radio programming here in Nepal different from the US?

I think there is a potential here for radio to be really significant in community life partly because

not many people here have television, the literacy level may be low and it's a remote region. So radio can act like a life line. Besides tying the community together, it can also bring the outside world to them.

In America, on the other hand, radio is one among a thousand ways to communicate. You've got the internet, satellite; certainly everybody has television, cable, podcasts and every other networking possibility.

Here, in Nepal, radio can be fundamental. So as a radio person, I actually sort of envy that scenario.

What inspired you to produce the series 'This I believe'?

All my work in radio is about inviting listeners to participate in public broadcasting. And I'm really interested in the public's voice and their stories. So this is one of many projects I do where I ask the listeners to tell their stories and contribute their voice, life and experiences to the radio. It's actually an idea that originated in the 1950s. Edward R. Murrow did this series first for about four years but then it stopped and nobody did it on radio for 50 years. We bought it back and did it for four years. There were essays from waitresses, nurses, taxi drivers, prisoners and, in fact, almost everyone across the spectrum of humanity, with each person writing an affirmative statement about what matters most to them. We had more than 65,000 people who wrote to us by the time we were done.

What do your programs offer to the audience?

An opportunity to listen. The world is very hectic and the media very noisy and often very argumentative, and full of conflict. They are using conflict as a magnet to grab people's attention, and this, too, in a very rushed manner. A lot of what's on news programs is what happened that second, that minute; and whoever gets it first wins. 'This I believe' runs counter to conflict. It's peaceful, it's meditative and pre-meditative. It's not about what you learn in a minute, it's about what you learn over a lifetimes. So it's very different from the nature of the media, which is why I liked the way it sounded on news show. And I think that people responded to that very deeply and they started to hear other people talking about their own lives.

Something about yourself and your radio programming?

As I said, I feel lucky to have gotten that break – that loaned tape recorder – and, in a real and metaphorical way, I've been loaning out tape recorders ever since. I started radio stations in my hometown where I live, and we were constantly working to get all the community on the air. That's not my recreational activity. I'm driven by real interest in doing stories of other people, which is a limitless well, it's a bottomless well.